

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8272
INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 21057

TOKYO FOR AMBASSADOR ABRAMOWITZ
CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, TH
SUBJ: POLITICAL SITUATION IN THAILAND

SUMMARY: POLITICAL SITUATION IN BANGKOK CONTINUES TO DEVELOP SLOWLY, WITH FOCUS ON DRAFT CONSTITUTION NOW BEFORE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. POLITICAL PARTIES CONTINUE TO DEVELOP PATTERN OF CAREFUL ACTIVITY, LIMITED BY FORMAL PROHIBITION OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY STILL IN FORCE. FORMER PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT HAS EXPRESSED INTEREST IN RESUMING POLITICAL LIFE ON HIS OWN BEHALF AND THAT OF FORMER SOCIAL ACTION PARTY. SOME SIGNS OF RESUMPTION OF STUDENT POLITICAL ACTIVITY HAS BEEN OBSERVED, BUT FOCUS IS ON CAMPUS RATHER THAN NATIONAL ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

1. POLITICAL SITUATION IN BANGKOK CONTINUES TO DEVELOP SLOWLY. WITH APPROVAL OF FIRST READING OF DRAFT CONSTITUTION JULY 13, DRAFT IS NOW IN HANDS OF MILITARY-DOMINATED CONSTITUTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR SECOND READING.
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FIFTEEN OUT OF 35 MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE ARE ACTIVE OR RETIRED MILITARY, FIVE OF WHOM ARE IDENTIFIED WITH SO-CALLED "YOUNG TURK" FACTION. OTHER MILITARY OR FORMER MILITARY MEMBERS DO NOT RPT NOT HAVE CLEARLY DEFINED FACTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS. APPEARS LIKELY THAT THERE WILL BE VIGOROUS EFFORTS MADE TO AMEND ORIGINAL DRAFT OF CONSTITUTION, THOUGH IT IS TOO EARLY TO JUDGE HOW

SUCCESSFUL THESE EFFORTS LIKELY TO BE. MAJOR QUESTIONS ARE LIKELY TO CENTER AROUND APPOINTMENT OF SENATORS (I.E., WHO WILL SELECT THEM) AND MANNER OF SELECTION OF CABINET MINISTERS AND PRIME MINISTER. VOICES ARE STILL TO BE HEARD IN NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY WHICH URGE TOTAL REJECTION OF DRAFT CONSTITUTION AND SIMPLE ENACTMENT OF ONE OR ANOTHER OF THE TEN THAI CONSTITUTIONS OF THE PAST. MOTIVES VARY, BUT ENACTMENT OF ONE OR ANOTHER OF PREVIOUS CONSTITUTIONS IS SEEN BY PROPONENTS AS EASIEST AND LEAST CONTROVERSIAL WAY OF APPROVING NEW CONSTITUTION.

2. POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITY CONTINUES, THOUGH STILL DISCREETLY. SENIOR FIGURE IN DEMOCRAT PARTY (PROBABLY STILL THAILAND'S LARGEST), TOLD EMBOFF JULY 4 THAT NEXT LEADER OF PARTY, AFTER EXPECTED RETIREMENT OF SENI PRAMOT, LIKELY TO BE PRAKOP HUTASING, CURRENTLY MEMBER OF PRIVY COUNCIL AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER IN SANYA CABINET IN 1974-75. HE SAID PRAKOP (NOW 67) WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO ALL FACTIONS OF DEMOCRAT PARTY BUT WOULD HAVE TO RESIGN FROM PRIVY COUNCIL TO PLAY OPENLY POLITICAL ROLE. (COMMENT: PROSPECTIVE REPLACEMENT AS DEMOCRAT PARTY LEADER OF 73-YEAR-OLD SENI PRAMOT BY PRAKOP WOULD STILL LEAVE DEMOCRATS WITH RATHER SENIOR LEADERSHIP. THAT PRAKOP SHOULD BE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED FOR SUCH A POSITION SUGGESTS THAT DEMOCRATS HAVE SO FAR BEEN UNABLE TO AGREE ON CHOOSING NEXT PARTY LEADER FROM AMONG THE FOUR VIGOROUS PARTY FIGURES--PHICHAJ
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RATTAKUN, SURIN MATSADIT, CHUAN LIKPHAI, AND DAMRONG LATTHIPHIPAT--NOW IN THEIR 30'S AND 40'S AT THE SECOND LEVEL OF THE PARTY.)

3. IN PRESS INTERVIEW JULY 9 FORMER PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT SAID THAT WHEN PERMANENT CONSTITUTION IS PROMULGATED HE WILL REVIVE HIS SOCIAL ACTION PARTY AND RUN IN GENERAL ELECTIONS. HE DID NOT SAY WHERE HE WOULD RUN BUT INDICATED HE WOULD CONSIDER STANDING FOR SEAT IN LAMPANG PROVINCE. (HE WAS DEFEATED IN BANGKOK CONSTITUENCY IN 1976.) ON ISSUE OF ELECTIONS HE SAID THAT THEY MUST BE HELD OR PRESTIGE OF GOVERNMENT WILL SUFFER, AS MILITARY LEADERS HAVE REPEATEDLY PROMISED TO HOLD GENERAL ELECTIONS. CONSIDERABLE PRESS INTEREST WAS ALSO SHOWN IN FACT THAT FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN LEFT BANGKOK JULY 20 FOR SWITZERLAND TOGETHER WITH KHUKRIT. CHATCHAI, FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THAI NATION PARTY, ATTRACTED ATTENTION BY EVASIVE ANSWER HE GAVE TO PRESS QUESTION AS TO WHETHER THAI NATION PARTY AND SOCIAL ACTION PARTY MIGHT MERGE BEFORE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS. (COMMENT: DEPARTURE OF KHUKRIT AND CHATCHAI TOGETHER APPEARS LARGELY FORTUITOUS, THOUGH CHATCHAI SERVED HARMONIOUSLY AS FOREIGN MINISTER IN

KHUKRIT CABINET AND THEIR PERSONAL RELATIONS HAVE ALWAYS APPEARED TO BE GOOD. KHUKRIT IS GOING TO SWITZERLAND FOR THREE-WEEK REST CURE AND MEDICAL TREATMENT IN ZURICH, FOLLOWED BY THREE-WEEK VISIT TO LONDON. CHATCHAI IS GOING TO SWITZERLAND ON BUSINESS TRIP. MERGER OF THE THAI NATION PARTY AND THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY MIGHT LEAD TO EMERGENCE OF A SINGLE PARTY OF ABOUT SAME SIZE AND INFLUENCE AS DEMOCRAT PARTY. UNLESS SUCH A MERGER TAKES PLACE, THAI NATION AND SOCIAL ACTION PARTIES RISK REMAINING ON SIDELINES OR JOINING UNSTABLE AND SHORT-LIVED COALITIONS WITH OTHER, SMALLER PARTIES.)

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4. FAINT SIGNS OF POLITICAL STIRRING AT CHULALONGKON AND THAMMASAT UNIVERSITIES IN BANGKOK HAVE BEEN NOTED IN LAST TWO MONTHS, FOCUSING TO DATE ON STUDENT PRESSURE FOR ELECTIONS OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES TO UNIVERSITY GOVERNMENT IN PLACE OF THE PRESENT, APPOINTED REPRESENTATIVES. THIS IS STILL A FAR CRY FROM THE HEAVILY POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS DURING THE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT, 1973-76, BUT REFLECT THE GROWTH OF INTEREST IN POLITICAL LIFE.

5. THERE HAVE BEEN NO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TERMS OF FIXING A DEFINITE DATE FOR THE FORTHCOMING GENERAL ELECTIONS. THE INTERIM CONSTITUTION CALLS FOR ELECTIONS BEFORE

THE END OF 1978 OR, AT THE LATEST, BEFORE THE END OF
APRIL, 1979. PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK HAS PRIVATELY
REFERRED TO ELECTIONS BEFORE THE END OF 1978, BUT HAS MORE
RECENTLY REFERRED TO ELECTIONS IN MARCH, 1979. ELECTIONS
BEFORE THE END OF 1978 ARE MOST UNLIKELY TO BE HELD, AS
THE PERMANENT CONSTITUTION, A POLITICAL PARTIES BILL, AND
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AN ELECTIONS BILL MUST FIRST BE PASSED.

6. COMMENT: IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO MAKE TOO MUCH OF ANY
OF THE POLITICAL STIRRINGS REFERRED TO ABOVE. HOWEVER, AS
ADDITIONAL POLITICAL GROUPINGS BEGIN TO TAKE SHAPE AND
POLITICAL PERSONALITIES COMMIT THEMSELVES TO PARTICIPATING
IN ELECTIONS, IT WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO PUT
OFF OR POSTPONE ELECTIONS BEYOND THE POINT MENTIONED IN THE
INTERIM CONSTITUTION. O'DONOHUE

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